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**Meeting the Artist in Transnational World: Jeff Goldberg with American  
Glance on Indian Theatre**



*Jeff Goldberg is an Actor and Film Director who, after finishing his Bachelors in Film and Television from Boston University, moved to Paris to attain Graduate degree in Film direction from EICAR, The International Film School of Paris, and embarked upon his professional career. While in his early 20's, Jeff wrote and directed his first independent feature film on the streets of Paris that was selected to the St. Petersburg International Film Festival. On the heels of that success, he began working as a director and screenwriter with French, American and Indian producers winning several prestigious screenwriting awards. After moving to India in his 30's, he directed a string of short films that were selected at several international film festivals and has staged hundreds of theatres shows all over India. In conjunction with his film work he has also been writing, directing and acting for the stage producing over 20 productions at some of India's most renowned venues and festivals. As an educator Jeff has taught at some of the leading film schools and acting programmes in the world; The Lee Strasberg Institute (NYC), EICAR, The International Film School of Paris, The School of Visual Arts (NYC) and Fordham University (NYC). Currently, Jeff runs one of the finest acting studios in India, The Jeff Goldberg Studio and has worked with many of India's top talents and a variety of NGOs; Salaam Bombay (educational initiative for slum children), Teach for India and Being with Beti (women's rights). Jeff's shows have played to sold-out audiences all over India. His work cuts across genres ranging from drama to comedy, classics to experimental. He dares to challenge the conventions of theatre with each new production, making sure to incorporate his school of acting The Goldberg Method. He regularly tackles classics and original work pushing the boundaries each time he stages a show. Jeff happens to be one of the most popular trainers for acting workshops in Mumbai. He is extremely vocal about all the issues that he brings out via*

*literary stories and performances and he loves meeting the youth with the sense of responsibility to be handed over to them. That is the responsibility of taking care of this world with the art of acting, the art of connecting people and the art of performing for humanity.*

*Dr. Bhagyashree Varma, Associate Professor of English at Mumbai University interviewed Jeff Goldberg to unravel the mystique about the active experimentalist and thinker artist in Theatre and film industry.*

BSV: Good afternoon, Jeff sir, should we start the conversation for this brief discussion on how did you start and where did you reach...Do you find acting more tough or directing more challenging as you have been practising both?

JEFF G: yeah, the journey of my acting and direction has almost been a simultaneous one, as I began with acting like most of us do, and drifted ahead with my vision how things should be seen and I realized I actually wanted to direct the flow...as you know, Theatre gives you always in the double...one boon comes free with the other....Both directing and acting come with a separate set of challenges. Acting requires you to explore your own human condition from the inside out, whereas direction is more about the lens with which you see the world.

BSV: yes. The clarity you achieved in your perceptive ideas of the roles as actor, and the responsibility as a director is indeed the boon. I have seen the upcoming young directors in a few places around who do not read much but ambitiously jump into the business of direction. I have seen your plays and the depth you attempt and acquire in the art of direction is quite visible in those. What do you prefer in generic flavour as drama, tragedy or comedy? Why?

JEFF G: In terms of genre, I'm not particularly partial to one or the other, and I think that today all of them are quite fluid. Of course, when you're working on film and/or theatre, there are certain ideas in certain set pieces that you have to acknowledge when you're being genre specific, but I think what would interest me more than a particular genre is a good story. A genre should be the result of the story, rather than just being the artifice that built it.

Bsv: I agree. I recall the quote of Mark Twain who replied to his questioner, on the matter of genre, saying, "I do not choose my genre, before I write, I just have a few places, a few events and a few people in my mind. And then the story takes its own shape when I try to blend all these...". For students of language and literature, which Genre is more important according to your observation, film or drama on stage?

JEFF G: For students of language and literature I think what's more important than film and or theatre is actually just having a great appreciation of narrative structure and understanding how the arc of a story really manifest itself across the timeline of the narrative itself. This is something you can apply to theatre and/or film, but the fundamentals remain the same.

BSV: what I see as the structure also is something that gets affected according the form it is structured in. Film or Drama, like you said are the forms that pick up the narrative which has to be appreciated. To clarify further if I may ask a little more on the same, staging a story and making a film on any narrative, seem to be different paths due to change of media, what similarities do you find in these?

JEFF G: The script. The script is the single most important thing in both. It is the scaffolding on which we can construct the whole project. Of course, the tools we use are different because a stage production and a film production are different, but ultimately the thing that binds them both together is the script. Once again, it's all about narrative structure.

BSV: That is right sir. Narrative seems to be the skeleton to be fleshed up and brought to life by the form it can be given. I am glad you used the word 'production' in saying stage production or film production as I see clearly now how we inescapably take the art as production, if not product, in today's consumeristic semantics, and the script is of course the source of production in this sense. In another perspective, though I am just trying to avoid the discussion on consumeristic lines, though by mistake I referred to that, 'Theatre' is a therapy in multiple ways for actors as well as for audience. What is your vision as a director?

JEFF G: I don't believe that art should ever be used as therapy. I think that there are some very smart people out there who spend many years learning how to treat the different psychosis and modalities of the mind. It would be a mistake to think that somehow art can remedy what we're feeling. However, it can certainly be an instigator and/or an agitator to allow us to seek out help. It becomes a reflection of who we are, but it should certainly not become the solution to who we are.

BSV: waa. I did not think this. In fact, you are profoundly into the art so you can tell us better about why art should not be seen as a therapy. Yes, I find your diction more appropriate to say it. Instigator, or agitator, are the exact words perhaps as the way to know or know better for acceptance or rejections as our response to art, or even life we find therein. My mind is right now full of questions so I am just roughly moving ahead with whatever comes to my mind as my next query so you may not find it a sequenced line of argument but I would certainly come back to connect with what we have been finding out through our conversation. So, sir, why did you choose to perform / direct a play in your professional life though like others you might be having many options in corporate or industrial world....

JEFF G: I chose to become a storyteller because it's the only thing that's ever really made sense to me. Early on in my life, I wanted to understand who I was... And the best way I could do that was through my writing and then through my directing. Each time I create something it becomes a piece of me, and I look back at it and understand something profound about myself. Surely, money and stability are very important. But I think I fully live. Life is one that is explored to its most profound moments. Art has allowed me to do just that.

BSV: Wonderful. I am glad you said you are able to find the full life into what you do. Most of the people would not be saying or finding that so smoothly. Nowadays people are twisting the stories, they are playing with ideologies, they are trying to reverse and do what not .... for instance, we get critical theories like feminism, Marxism and so on to apply to narratives and the artists are probably following the same trials. What do you think of the feminist remakes of historical or mythological stories?

JEFF G: I think having a new lens apply to ancient stories is healthy. If you understand the role of ancient stories, i.e. Greek theatre and others, these were teasing out philosophical precepts. They were lensed and conceived by men. But sadly, they ignored a whole half of our human

condition - the human condition of the woman. Often times women were relegated to secondary characters or punished for things that would otherwise perhaps not have been their fault. Of course, reimagining of things is going to start controversy, but I think more importantly it should spark conversation.

BSV: I know. I have been observing the discourses in literary and other areas wherein people will either be double or silent in talking about such controversial subjects. I am glad you mentioned the historical absence of women from ancient western and world theatres and now we are fortunate enough to find women not only on stage but also in the makers or stage and scripts! Apart from the socio-political controversies on gender roles or gender spaces, many a times theatre has been trapped into the utility-based productions of stories for political streaming or even propaganda. What is your opinion about theatre as an agency for political propagation?

JEFF G: Theatre and film are political. Of course, there is so much to say on this matter that I can go on and on for hours. But to imagine that art is somehow apolitical is both false and frightening. One lens is a story - albeit for the stage, film, a painting, sculpture, or anything - the fact is that you were saying something about the world from the point of view of which you see it. This perspective is inherently political. The danger becomes when we are unable to hear and/or see what is being said. Art is a conversation... It is not a 'full stop' at the end of our day.

BSV: So that is the purpose in a way. All art is useless said Matthew Arnold. But we do not agree on the uselessness of art as we are pouring the use, social or political to sense it out and make it so connected to us. Sometimes the written text is changed by the directors as they find it suitable in their version to be performed on stage. What are your views about changing the text while dramatizing or making a film as the director's license?

JEFF G: I think adapting the text is very important. Of course it depends on whose text you're adapting. Shakespeare, for instance, should never be tampered with, unless you absolutely have a justifiable reason. That said, justifiable reason is always (and only) the reason to change a text. The reason could be a vision on the part of the director, or a change in society, or perhaps even just the way an actor feels about particular piece. But change must be manifested and motivated by something that is tangible and real.

BSV: Why not. The director has to work with his own vision and so the actor. I am finding your stance not merely clear in the wisdom of experienced voice but also full of pragmatic and factual observations that you must have acquired through your experience. When did you realise you should act or direct shows and films and what kind of Stories did you initially work on?

JEFF G: I was in my early adolescence when I realized that I wanted to be a storyteller. But chances are I've always been telling stories, in fact when I was a little boy, I used to tell great big lies. And I put myself right at the centre of those lies. However, today, I realize that those lies weren't intended to mislead people, but rather to invent stories. I guess I've always been a storyteller. Why do I do it.? Because it's all I really know how to do. What I want from the experience is simply to just share something meaningful that I've experienced with those who

choose to watch my work. I hope that they feel an authentic connection to the work and discover something meaningful about themselves in the process

BSV: What an epiphanic line of realization sir. I wonder how did you stay so courageous in maintaining your transparency. Let me just sum up my line of queries for now, with my last but not the least important one, what is your message for learners of Theatre?

JEFF G: My message for learners of theatre is read as much theatre as humanly possible, but more importantly get to the theatre as often as possible. Please, make sure that you are at a show every weekend... or every day as best you can. We learned by doing as much as we learned by watching.

BSV: Books are the best friends we used to say before the screen, the touchphone or kindle entered in our lives, even now we do read books as far as possible but the difference is we spend hours on WhatsApp, fb, insta, whatever social media grabs our attention, and the library has become a deserted village in itself. Though this may look childish on my part sir, let me just ask you innocently, what books did you read on the theatrical Arts or what theories / techniques would you recommend the struggling actors to follow?

JEFF G: Gosh, books... The book that comes to mind the most is one called Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maire Rilke. It's a very important and beautiful book written in the early 20th century. As for what I would recommend... Just keep dreaming, doing, working, training, and most importantly focus. One talks about talent very often in our industry, however, unfortunately talent makes someone think that they're really good at what they're doing. When in fact, it takes a tremendous amount of effort and work to truly retrieve anything meaningful. Take your talent and allow it to meet your tenacity and hard work, and the sky is the limit.

BSV: Thank you very much, Jeff sir, for the enlightening interaction to convey to the world that art can connect people and save the world by keeping humanity sane amidst AI avalanche. Amen.